



# The Barn Dance Opera Journal



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**Vol. 90 2016**

**Fall Edition**

**1**

*Barn Dance Band Profile Series*

## **Al Alderson, It's All about the Bass ... & Vocals, & Friends**

by Grant Heywood

I've known, and performed with Al Alderson for almost 17 years. When it comes to playing great bass guitar, you can always count on Al. When it comes to being a friend and having your back, you can always count on Al. He is the kind of musician who can fit into almost any musical genre and is always up for the challenge. It was inevitable that Al would take on a musical path. At age 12 he was asked to guest and play guitar as backup at a Kiwanis Music Festival. He took home an award ahead of the students and was asked not to return. Now that's good timing.

Born in London, Ont., Al spent much of his formative years in Ingersoll. At age 5, Al was playing a guitar case at home for fun. At age 11, his parents gave him a real guitar for Christmas and said he'd have to learn a song by New Years or the guitar would go back to the store. That's when he learned "Folsom Prison Blues" in record time. Al always wanted to be in a band and soon auditioned for the Jack Story band as the bass player. Al is self-taught and found more work as a bass guitarist with the Top 40 band Free Spirit. Music was always on Al's mind and was prevalent in the family as his two uncles would always be picking and playing bluegrass tunes.

Al was soon on his way in the music world. He remembers fondly of his 3 piece band opening for Kitty Wells at the Thedford Fair, when he was 16. He even played guitar with Betty Beer when he was 17. Today Al and his

wife (and biggest fan), Julie, reside in Shakespeare, Ont., and have been married for 17 years. Al has 3 children and 3 grandkids from a former spouse. He's also a steel working foreman at Hunter Steel in Stratford when he's not playing bass guitar and singing, or helping Julie with her dog grooming business.

Haggard, Paycheck, Jones, and Roger Quick are some of Al's biggest influences. He played with the Whiskey Jack Music Co. and then Sunrise with Doug Dietrich for many years, before becoming the permanent bass player/singer with the Barn Dance Band. It wasn't long until Larry Mercey employed Al as part of the Larry Mercey Trio, along with former Barn Dance Band guitarist, George Lonsbury. This part of Al's musical journey was key to him, as he credits Larry Mercey, Doug Dietrich, George Lonsbury, Doug Johnson, the late Mike Slauenwhite and Grant Heywood, as his trusted mentors and friends. Now that's a tall order.

In his travels, Al has met several of his musical heroes such as Charlie Pride, Vince Gill, and Grand Ole Opry bandleader, Jimmy Capps. But Al feels quite fortunate to have backed up and played onstage with George Hamilton IV, Marie Bottrell, Gordie Tapp, Naomi Bristow, Paul Weber, Earl & Martha Heywood, and Larry Mercey. Becoming a member of the Larry Mercey Trio has been an honouring experience for Al, and needless to say an education in singing perfect 3 part harmony. "I love Larry. He's taught me a lot." says Al.

Playing with the Barn Dance Band is also one of Al's favourite times to play on the big stage, especially with good friends. Al says, "I look up to my fellow musicians who are some of my best friends, and I remember some of those treasured moments when Mike Slauenwhite would be in his element playing a dazzling fiddle solo". "It doesn't get any better than that." Al said, "It's a real privilege to be a part of the Barn Dance history and heritage, and especially with a truly great emcee, Mr. Jim Swan."

Al's fine bass playing can be heard on many recordings, including, The Heywood Family 3 Generations, The

*Continued on Page 3*



*Al Alderson performing at a Barn Dance.*

## The Editor Speaks

by Grant Heywood



It's hard to believe that summer has come and gone. With all of that sunshine, this has certainly been one of the hottest of summers on record. The humidity was unbearable at times but we'll have to see what old man winter brings. Then we'll have something different to complain about.

I was fortunate enough to get most of our kitchen renovations done before the summer heat got too intense. My winter project will be the upstairs bathroom. Let's hope it doesn't drag out as long as our kitchen did. Onward and upward.

Most people know how I feel about television awards show programs. I'm really not a big fan of any awards shows period but I do understand how most folks like to see what is trending and to view their favourite stars. I watched the latest CCMA awards show which took place in London, Ontario. I hardly recognized any of the nominees and I really didn't know many of the songs they performed. (Must be the 'old fart' syndrome.) I realize that the transformation from old country to new country is pretty much completed now but I'm not so sure it is for the better, but that's just my opinion.

I have no problem with younger artists trying to make their mark in today's country music world, it's hard enough as it is. I just don't understand

the phoniness of some of the production the artists have to endure. A lot of banjos, which was great, but many used as one note props at this year's CCMA's, (I guess it's the latest fad) and hardly a steel guitar in sight. Michelle Wright and Terri Clark were the most recognizable names to me as Terri did an acoustic medley of her hits. Some of the new artists have the image but they just seem to be lacking in emotional depth and substance. Maybe that's because I grew up on country music that dealt with less partying and more on love, heartache and real problems. Sigh.

Brett Kissel's song 'I Didn't Fall in Love With Your Hair', about women suffering from the effects of cancer treatment, was one of the saving graces of the show. Admittedly, Dean Brody and Gord Bamford were encouraging. I was glad to see that local musicians, Ed Ringwald (steel guitar), Jason Berry (guitar) and Shane Guse (fiddle) all took home some hardware. But they never received any airtime on the screen as well as the Country Music Legends show that was hosted by the CCMA. It was a two hour show and I'm sure that they could have had more guests and presenters on the program if it weren't for the hokey comedy-like filler used in the program, mainly to promote Jack Daniels whiskey. (a sponsor for the CCMA's)

I'm happy that we have the CCMA awards in Canada to promote Canadian country music. My dad was one of the founding fathers of the CCMA. I just wish that the awards program and country music radio would embrace classic country music that still endures today, along with the new artists. Americana music is more in tune with the old and the new than today's

## The Barn Dance Historical Society and Entertainment Museum

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and Lynn Russwurm.

country music and maybe that's why I like it so much. But there are a lot of country music lovers out there. My wish is that the industry could cater to them all.

If it's real country music you're looking for, then check out our Barn Dance schedule. There are one or two shows left this season and we'd love to see you at the next Barn Dance Show.

Comments? Please contact:

Grant Heywood

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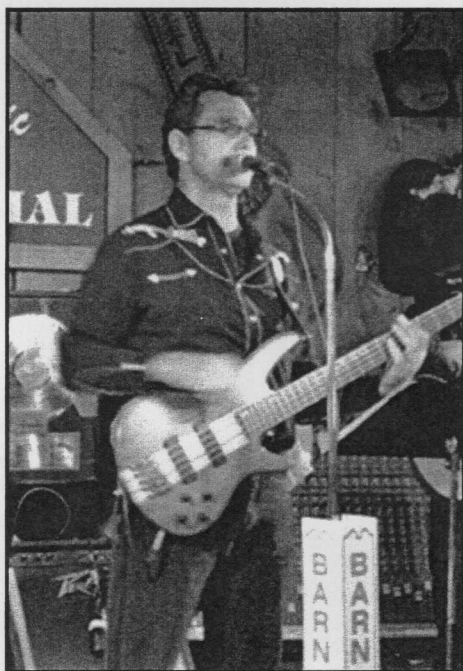
## 2016 / 2017 COMING EVENTS

Date	Event Name	Place
Sun., Sept. 25	Barn Dance Show - 2:30 p.m.	Southwold Community Complex, Shedden
Sun., Nov. 20	Barn Dance Christmas Show - 2:30 p.m.	Brigden Fairgrounds Exhibition Hall, Brigden
Sun., April 23, 2017	Fundraiser - Appin Pres. Church - 2:30 p.m.	Glencoe Agricultural Hall, Glencoe

*Continued from Page 1*

Larry Mercey Trio, fiddler, Dan Mighton's first CD, and Rose and Tom Merrigan's first recording. I asked Al why he plays a 5 string bass and he said, "It's one better than 4." LOL Actually, Al said it gives him more options to play on the neck and get some of those nice low notes when required. When it comes to musical gear, Al has some of the best, including a brand new Ampeg amplifier and a regular 5 string bass as well as a newly acquired custom 5 string bass.

At one time horses were a big part of Al & Julie's life. But music has now become a passion for Al. He likes to listen to Vince Gill, Rhonda Vincent, Patty Loveless and some of the new stuff when he's not laying down the bass. And I can tell you that Al can really click with the drummer. We've become a tight rhythm section whoever we perform with. Whether he's singing *Amarillo By Mornin'*, or just keeping the bottom end together. There is no doubt that Al Alderson will make it happen, with consistency and perfect timing. And as a great guy and true friend, he already has.



*Al Alderson performing at a Barn Dance Show.*

## CHANGE: SOMETHING YOU REALLY CAN'T ESCAPE

Anyone will tell you that change is inevitable, but most people don't like change and sometimes even fear it. A few of the many old adages about change: "*You can't stop progress*". or, "*Change is for the better.*" or, "*Time changes everything, the only thing permanent is change.*" Change is something that we all experience in life and like it or not, it will happen.

Part of the reason people become nostalgic about the past is really because they wished things were the way they used to be. A big reason people fight change so much is because they become comfortable with the status quo. When it comes to change, we have seen more change in the last 20 years than many people before us have seen in a lifetime. Is that good or bad? Most people aren't comfortable with the speed of change and so become sentimental, and yearn for "the good old days".

We start changing as soon as we are born, and just like the diapers that get changed daily, we soon grow into adults. Change the channels, change the batteries, change your hairdo, change your attitude, change your lifestyle... it's all relevant. Politics and governments change almost as often as we do the laundry. Those vintage cars we all love will soon be transformed into the electric cars of the future (which is now). How we do business, communicate, travel or entertain ourselves, it is all relative to time and change. As former U.S. President Woodrow once said, 'If you want to make enemies try to change something'. Most people really don't like change, and would love to continue without upsetting their daily lives. But as Henry David Thoreau once said, "Things do not change; we change", which is so true.

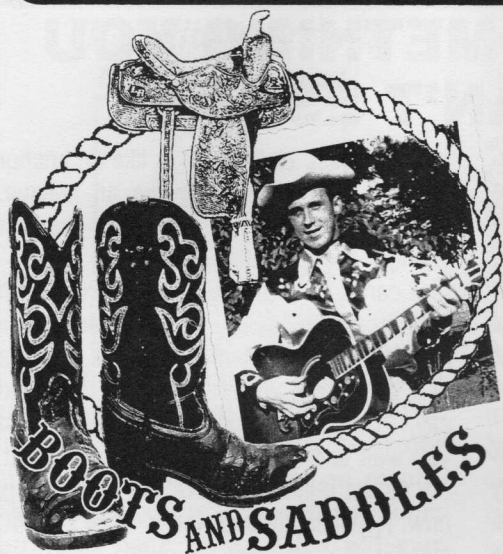
Often times we revel at how the people in the backwoods of Kentucky and Tennessee haven't changed their way of life over the years. Or we love it when we go to a foreign country that hasn't progressed much and has stayed the way it has been for decades. Kind of like when we reminisce at classic car shows, or see an old movie, or want to hear music like we remembered it way back when. As we get older, we embrace change less and hang

onto our past. Holding on is like an anchor and we kind of become like an antique. Hell, we live in Canada and the weather changes more often than we do.

I can remember being on the road with country bands and the guys would hear a new Vince Gill or Martina McBride re-make of a song from yesterday on the radio and say, "The old stuff is coming back, just you wait and see." The truth is... it's not. Try as we might, that was then and this is now. It makes anyone who is older than 40 feel like they've been put out to pasture. If you read my editorial you'll understand how I feel like that too.

Obviously, we cannot control time or change, and it is likely in our best interest to move with it. That doesn't mean we have to like it. We can still enjoy what we once had. Country music is a part of our heritage and changes like the wind. You can still enjoy the past, that's why we promote Barn Dance Shows that reflect that era of music. Having young talent that respects our values on the Barn Dance stage is where the past meets the future. It's why we enjoy it so much. It's also the reason we like to revisit our past by checking out places like the Barn Dance Museum in Wingham.

Nothing will stay the same as it used to be, but at least we can try to make those changes work for all of us, so it doesn't seem so abrupt. Sometimes we become died in the wool and fuddy duddy about change. As Bernard Shaw once said, "Progress is impossible without change, and those who cannot change their minds cannot change anything." That kind of explains it but I'll let theoretical physicist, Stephen Hawking have the last word here. Hawking said, "I have noticed even people who claim everything is predestined, and that we can do nothing to change it, look before they cross the road." I can't argue with that. A change is as good as a rest, they say.



## Traditional Country Music's Best Friend Succumbs to Illness

*Lynn Russwurm's music and efforts to promote the genre he loved will carry on.*

*Reprinted, with permission, from The Elmira Woolwich Observer*

Local songwriter, musician, producer and record-collector, Lynn Russwurm, passed away on Monday, June 29, 2016. He was 85.

He was well-known around these parts - and southern Ontario for that matter - for his love of traditional country music and spent most of his life writing it, playing it, and helping to keep it alive.

Russwurm created the popular Sunday Night Concert Series, which sees country and bluegrass musicians perform at Gore Park in Elmira every Sunday throughout the summer, packing in large crowds for the free concerts. It's now in its 10th year. He had planned to come out and play a bit this summer, but then he fell ill.

Despite being unwell, he still booked all the performers himself this year. His son Lance Russwurm will now take over.

"He wants his songs to go on. He's hoping his music will be played after he's gone. We're going to continue with those Sunday night shows he's been doing. Those will continue. He's

very proud of starting that. That in particular he's proud of because they've become a really big event in Elmira," Russwurm said.

Lynn learned to play guitar as a teenager and created the Pine River Troubadours, his first band, with Stan Taylor, when he was 19. Later he teamed up with his wife Laura as "The Pine River Sweethearts." The band performed all over southern Ontario from the CKNX Barn Dance in Wingham to the Main Street Jamboree in Hamilton.

They stopped performing to raise a family, but were soon out singing and playing again, this time as the Hummingbirds, which they did for some 15 years.

He also led the Jamboree Reunion Band, which was born out of an Old Timer's Reunion he organized for seven years in Kitchener.

Later, he joined forces with Bob Tremblay to create The Two Plus Who.

Lynn wrote hundreds of songs over his 60-some years in the music industry. Some of which made it into his own CDs, and others that were sung by fellow musicians. He released a songbook just last year as a companion to his 2012 DC, "Singing My

Songs." He also wrote seven of the songs on Lance's recent album, "Self Portrait."

"In addition to the music, which everybody knows about, he had one of the largest record collections in Canada until a year to two ago when he sold everything," Russwurm said.

His Floradale home used to house some 30,000 albums, a true testament to his love of music.

Lance notes he was just speaking to The Commercial Tavern owner Paul Weber about how they, along with other musicians like Grant Heywood, all had fathers who were musicians in that generation. They all had one thing in common; they were gentlemen.

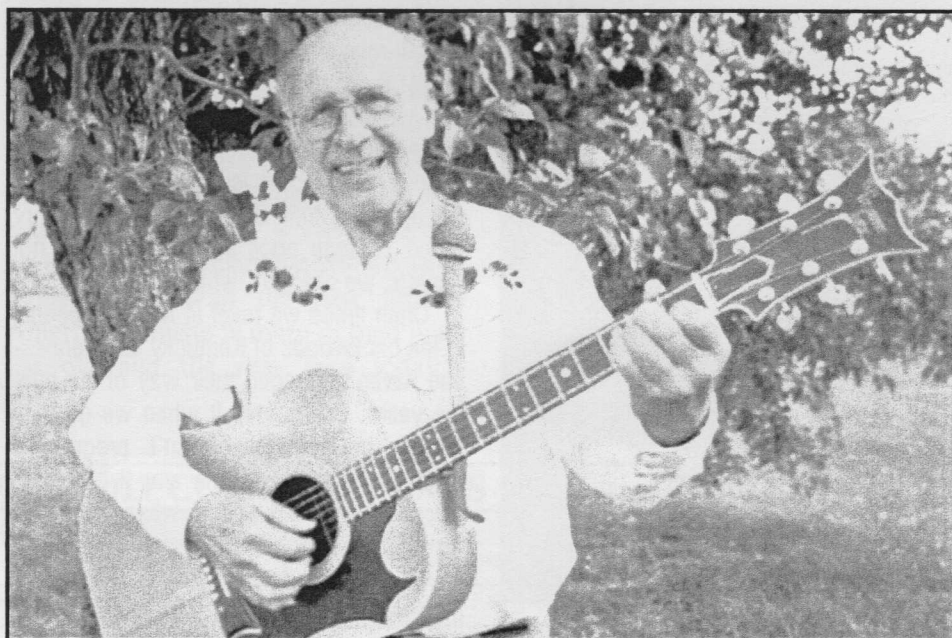
"Dad meant well to everybody, helped out everybody. He raised two families, adopted a bunch of kids, he just lived for making people happy through his music."

### Booking the Barn Dance

*If you are interested in more information about booking the Barn Dance Musical Production, please write to:*

*Barn Dance Bookings, P. O. Box 68,  
Wingham, Ont. N0G 2W0;  
or call ~ (519) 530-8000*

*E-mail: [webmaster@thebardance.ca](mailto:webmaster@thebardance.ca)*



*Lynn Russwurm*

## BARN DANCE SOUVENIRS

Souvenir Mugs -	\$ 5.00 ea.
CD - Vol. 1	\$15.00 ea.
CD - Vol. 2	\$15.00 ea.
CD - Vol. 3	\$15.00 ea.
CD - Vol. 1, 2 & 3	\$40.00 set
Cassette - Vol. 1	\$ 6.00 ea.
Cassette - Vol. 2	\$ 6.00 ea.
Cassette - Vol. 3	\$ 6.00 ea.
Souvenir 1997 Calendar	\$ 5.00 ea.
Barn Dance Logo T-Shirts (gold logo on blue only)	
Sizes S, M, L, XL, XXL	\$20.00 ea.
NEW Heywood Family Three Generations CD	\$20.00 ea.
NEW Al Cherny CD - "Live / The Lost Recordings"	\$15.00 ea.
NEW Eleanor & Graham Townsend CD "The Talented Townsends" (36 unheard recordings)	\$15.00 ea.
Best of The Barn Dance CD	\$15.00 ea.

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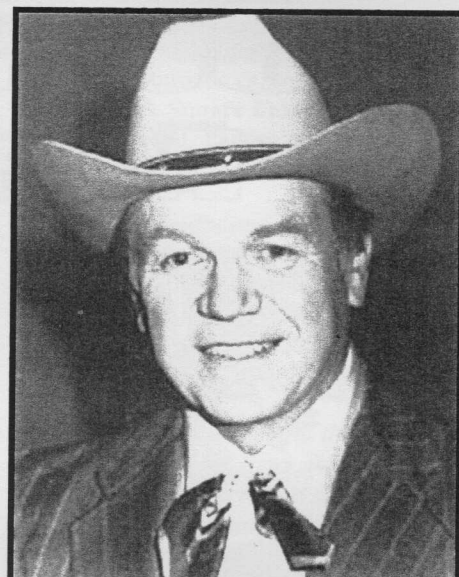
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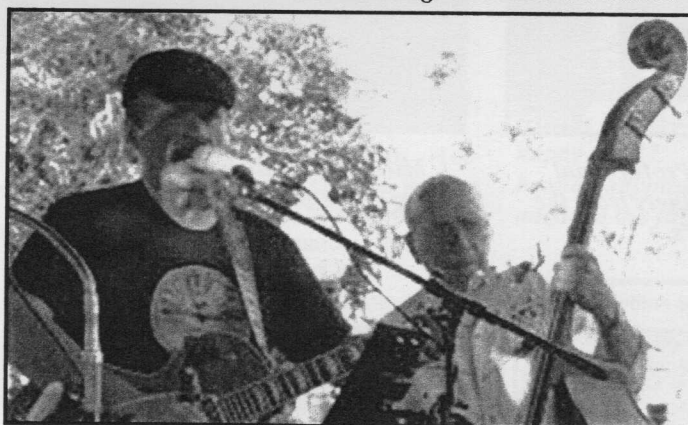
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*It has been 10 years this September since Barn Dance Pioneer Earl Heywood passed on at age 89. Earl had a vision and helped re-establish the Barn Dance Shows via the Barn Dance Historical Society. Earl's wife Martha is still living at age 92. The Barn Dance Historical Society is indebted to Earl and continues to maintain the Barn Dance Entertainment Museum in Wingham, and provide traditional country music shows throughout western Ontario.*



*Lynn and son, Lance, Russwurm playing together at a summer concert at Gore Park in Elmira. Since the recent passing of Lynn Russwurm, Lance and family will be continuing the Elmira Gore Park Summer Concert Series again next year, by popular demand.*

## STEEL GUITAR SHAKE UP

by Grant Heywood

Earlier this year when they were organizing the CCMA Awards, there was a big hullabaloo about discontinuing the steel guitar category from the awards. Fiddle, bass guitar, guitar, drums, etc. were all fine, but not steel guitar. It took a lot of campaigning by many steel guitarists and steel guitar lovers to make the CCMA see the light on this. Local award winning steel player, Pee Wee Charles (Ed Ringwald) was one of those leading the charge. It wasn't long before the CCMA directors got enough flak from those who play and love the instrument.

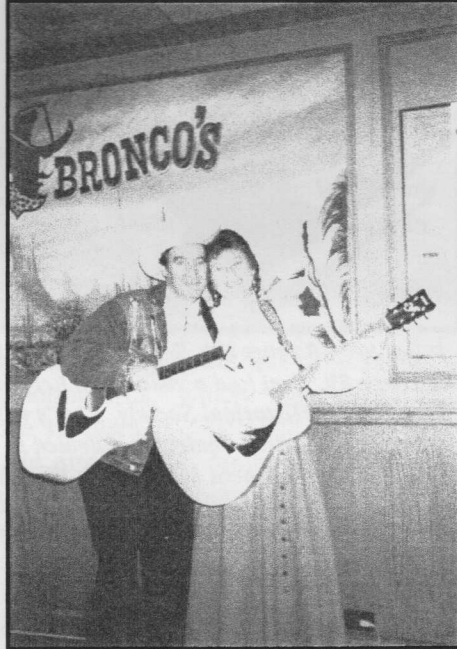
And it's not just an instrument of

country music. The steel guitar has a long history going back to the Hawaiian guitar and the early steel guitars without pedals. Although I don't recall seeing many steel guitars at the CCMA Awards this year, I did see a lot of banjos. There was a time when they didn't want to see or hear that instrument either. But if it's real country you're after, then the steel guitar rules supreme. Of course fiddle is right up there too. If CCMA can reinstate the steel guitar because of people speaking out, maybe there's hope for real country music too. Hmmm.

# Country Music Memories



*The Paul Brothers. Professional music/comedy entertainers from the 50's & 60's.*



*Michael T. Wall & Doreen Brown posing at the Bronco Benefit Show 1996.*



*Lloyd Bank, steel guitarist with the Mainstreet Jamboree and the CKNX Barn Dance, early 1950's.*



*Andy Winters, country singer and regular on the Barn Dance in the 50's & 60's.*



*Brenda Allen, country singer and regular on the Barn Dance, 1960's.*



*Joanie Riehl, country singer who appeared on the Barn Dance early 1960's.*

## COUNTRY CALENDAR



by Doreen Brown

(Toronto and surrounding area)

\* **Second Tuesday of the month** - Dance and music jam 7 - 10:30 p.m., Thornton Banquet Hall, above the Thornton Arena, 2246 Barrie St., Thornton. Contact Pat Hastings 705-487-3502, p.r.hastings@bell.net \$5.00 per person.

\* **November 19 & Dec. 17** - Date's for Roger Long's band, The Country Classics; Stratford Legion, Stratford.

\* **November 12** - Gospel Concert at 7 p.m. Debbie McLean daughters of the king, songs from the heart. At the Maranatha Church, 100 College Street West, Belleville K8P 2K7.

\* **For upcoming appearances** - Contact Wendell Ferguson, Wendell@wendellferguson.com 416-245-1251.

\* **October 23** - Show a tribute to iconic performer, Whiskey Jack's stories and songs of Stompin' Tom hits the stage at the Gibson Centre in Alliston. This is a Toronto based band that was a regular backing band for Stompin' Tom for several years.

\* **Rescue Junction Gospel/Bluegrass presents Kaitlyn Gerber** - Oct. 15 living water fellowship, New Hamburg. Oct. 16 big red river food grains project fundraiser, Knox Presbyterian Church. Oct. 29 Meaford Milverton Mennonite, fundraiser in Milverton. Oct. 30 First Baptist Church in Ingersol.

\* **Michael T. Wall** - Michael has released a collection of recordings; the first will be 10 Greatest Hits. In December volume one and volume two of Christmas Memories. Heritage music is releasing all of his recordings from 1970 until now. This year Michael will be nominated for the "Living Legend Award." Michael can be contacted at mr.nfld99@gmail.com.

\* **For Upcoming Appearances** - Contact Jim Beech, recording artist 519-353-5801 jimbbeech@bmts.com.

\* **October 8 and November 22** - Appearances by Jessica Wedden; Oct. 8 Norwood Fair 1 p.m. Nov. 22 Mason's Fundraiser in Wapanee at 7 p.m. Nov 22 North Frontenac Little Theatre, Sharbot.

\* **October 22** - Johnny Burke presents

Fall Country with Wendy Lynn Snider snider@gmail.com. Aisha Craig premier Classic Country Theatre Show. Nov. 13 friends of the Olde Town; Upper Middle Road and Brant Street, Burlington. Carrigan Arms will be from 2 - 6 p.m.

\* **For Live Entertainment** - Contact Gary Peters in Lindsay 705-324-9354.

\* **Oct. 2, Nov. 6 & Dec. 4** - Purple Hill presents a new season of memories at 2 p.m. For more information contact Anna 519-461-0538. The following entertainment; Stompin' Jon, Donnie Bentum, Eric Shane, Caroline Danowski Burchill, Phillip Burnette. Roast beef dinner for \$40. November 6 at 2 p.m. Boys of Purple Hill special guest Andy Vickers as Johnny Cash in the ring of fire show. December 4 roast beef dinner for \$40. www.purplehillcountryhall.com

\* **Appearances by Doreen Brown** - On the third Tuesday in every month she will be in Rosemont. On the second Thursday of every month Doreen will be in Thornton. On the second Sunday of every month she will be at the Shelburne Legion.

\* **For Upcoming Country Music Appearances** - Contact the Army, Navy and Airforce, Lakeview Unit 202, 765 Third Street, Mississauga 905-274-3821.

\* **Appearances by Doreen Brown** - Tottenham Bluegrass Festival, children judging panel; Pickin' in the Park, Shelburne; Classic Country Music Reunion; Norwood Country Jamboree; Rosemont Jam.

\* **October 22** - At the Moose Lodge, Lakeshore and HWY 27 presents Mary Rowan and Magnum at 8 p.m. Dinner dance \$20 with the following entertainment; Mary Rowan and Magnum, Mel Aucoin, Bobby Lucier, Steve Peticco, Tod Nolan, Lindsay Beckett, Bill Caruthers.

\* **Kiley Joe Music** - For upcoming appearances of Kiley Joe Music Entertainment, please contact Lindsay 519-485-6542,

Lindsay@kmusic.ca, www.kileyjoe.com.

\* **Fiddle & Square Fiddling & Old Time Square Dance Parties** - Contact Ralph and Sandy Price, 22 Trillium Trail, RR #4 Coldwater, 705-835-3159, ralph.sandyprice@sympatico.ca

\* **October 29** - Halloween Show including country music. Doors open at 7 p.m. at the Bradford Barn 3287 9th Line, Bradford, 905-252-1844, www.thebradfordbarn.com, thebradfordbarn@thebradfordbarn.

*My deepest condolences to the family and friends of the late Lynn Russwurm, like so many others knew him for many years and he was a country music friend. Recently we lost another member of the country music family Scotty Wells of the Linda and Scotty duo. Who were known on the circuit. They were well known in the Toronto area and spent many visits on their stages over the years. The above will be remembered in my treasure chest of country music.*

*As this will be the last issue for 2016 a little early, wishing all of our readers and friends a very Merry Christmas and a happy 2017. Wishing everyone good health, happiness and enjoying country music to the fullest.*

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←  
Naomi Bristow received the Barn Dance Heritage Award at a Barn Dance Show at Purple Hill on May 1, 2016. Congratulations to you, Naomi.

→  
Barn Dance Pioneer Ron Coulthard, onstage at a Barn Dance show. Ron and his wife Ann recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. It was a celebration with family, friends and music.



## BARN DANCE CORNER

by Peter Saros

It makes sense that I first came to know Lynn Russwurm through a song.

Russwurm was an avid advocate of traditional country music. His Floradale, Ontario home was testament to that. 30,000 records – said to be one of the largest record collections in Canada – filled the house. Until, that is, he up and sold the whole collection from his hospital bed in 2015.

His love of traditional country music was not tied to a dusty and distant past; he was no mere archivist. He wasn't consumed with collecting so much as he was promoting country music as a living art form. His Sunday Night Concert series in Elmira, Ontario is now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year. Russwurm created the event. It is committed to celebrating live bluegrass and classic country music performances every Sunday throughout the summer. At 85 years of age, and in failing health, Russwurm booked all the 2016 summer

performers.

His *Boots & Saddles* column in this journal was a wonderful platform to bring attention to both classic and contemporary Canadian country music. His writing had the grace and simple eloquence of a country gentleman. His son Lance said, "Dad meant well to everybody, helped out everybody. He raised two families, adopted a bunch of kids, he just lived for making people happy through his music."

In 1996 Capitol Records released a series of CDs dedicated to the most important music to come out of that studio in Los Angeles, California. The artists ranged from Ferlin Husky to Merle Haggard to Tex Williams & His Western Caravan. One of those artists included Hank Thompson. In the notes to the Thompson collection country music historian and journalist Rich Kienzle wrote, "The dark, foreboding 1961 ballad "I Cast a Lonesome Shadow" departed from Thompson's trademark sound. Canadian songwriter Lynn Russwurm sent Hank a partial melody and lyric fragment. Hank wrote the rest. Reflecting on it in 1996, he said, "It kinda reminded me

of Edgar Allen Poe's poem "The Raven." It had a real subtle implication, and so I was attracted by the idea of the title and the song."

I recall purchasing that album from Cheapo Discs on Snelling Avenue in St. Paul, Minnesota. Russwurm's song stood out on the collection of honky tonk songs wrapped in a dance-able western swing package. The song was a dark, brooding, and atmospheric number, ringing with echo and reverb. It certainly stuck in my head.

Imagine my surprise when I found myself with Lynn Russwurm in Canada in that Floradale, Ontario farmhouse some eight years later as an account executive for Hamilton's 820 CHAM "The Legend," a classic country music station at the time. If Lynn was pleased I knew the Thompson song, I was even more pleased that I now knew Lynn.

Now, I didn't sell a single minute of air time to Lynn at what was supposed to be a sales call, but I did receive an invitation to attend a board meeting of The Barn Dance Historical Society.

Thank you, Lynn.